

## Charge to the Acton Congregational Church Confirmation Class of 2021

Rev. Andrew Harris · June 13, 2021

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### Isaiah 61:1-11

The Lord God's spirit is upon me,  
because the Lord has anointed me.  
He has sent me  
to bring good news to the poor,  
to bind up the brokenhearted,  
to proclaim release for captives,  
and liberation for prisoners,  
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor  
and a day of vindication for our God,  
to comfort all who mourn,  
to provide for Zion's mourners,  
to give them a crown in place of ashes,  
oil of joy in place of mourning,  
a mantle of praise in place of discouragement.  
They will be called Oaks of Righteousness,  
planted by the Lord to glorify himself.  
They will rebuild the ancient ruins;  
they will restore formerly deserted places;  
they will renew ruined cities,  
places deserted in generations past.

Foreigners will stay and shepherd your sheep,  
and strangers will be your farmers and  
vine-dressers.  
You will be called The Priests of the Lord;  
Ministers of Our God, they will say about  
you.  
You will feed on the wealth of nations,

and fatten yourself on their riches.  
Instead of shame, their portion will be double;  
instead of disgrace, they will rejoice over their  
share.  
They will possess a double portion in their land;  
everlasting joy will be theirs.  
I, the Lord, love justice;  
I hate robbery and dishonesty.  
I will faithfully give them their wage,  
and make with them an enduring covenant.  
Their offspring will be known among the  
nations,  
and their descendants among the peoples.  
All who see them will recognize  
that they are a people blessed by the Lord.

I surely rejoice in the Lord;  
my heart is joyful because of my God,  
because he has clothed me with clothes of  
victory,  
wrapped me in a robe of righteousness  
like a bridegroom in a priestly crown,  
and like a bride adorned in jewelry.  
As the earth puts out its growth,  
and as a garden grows its seeds,  
so the Lord God will grow righteousness and  
praise before all the nations.

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### Ephesians 4:1-6

Therefore, as a prisoner for the Lord, I encourage you to live as people worthy of the call you received from God. Conduct yourselves with all humility, gentleness, and patience. Accept each other with love, and make an effort to preserve the unity of the Spirit with the peace that ties you together. You are one body and one spirit, just as God also called you in one hope. There is one Lord, one faith, one baptism, and one God and Father of all, who is over all, through all, and in all.

Today is confirmation Sunday, but what our confirmands are really doing is affirming their baptism. They are affirming the choice that the church and their families made for them years ago, before they could decide for themselves. Through their baptisms they were reconciled to God and made one with Christ. Now, years later, after a year and a lifetime of studying, reflecting, discussing, questioning, seeking, and praying, each of them has decided to affirm what has been true since their baptism, what has been true since before they were even born: they are children of God, born of the Spirit, one with Jesus Christ.

When Jesus is baptized by John in the Jordan River, the sky breaks open as he comes out of the water, and the Holy Spirit descends from heaven like a dove. It rests upon him and a voice comes from heaven saying, “You are my Son, the beloved. With you I am well pleased.” It is an amazing, miraculous story of baptism, and one that we would do well to remember each time we baptize or confirm new members into the church. Yes, your own baptism is reflected in Christ’s. You are proclaimed a child of God, you are redeemed and reconciled into Christ’s loving, transformative, life-giving grace. Today, I pray that you too, Confirmands, might feel the Holy Spirit descend upon you, filling you and surrounding you with love and light. On this day, God is speaking to you, too, reclaiming your life, affirming that you are beloved, created perfectly, specially, uniquely. With you all, God is well pleased.

What often doesn’t get mentioned as much at baptisms and confirmations however is what happens immediately after Jesus’s baptism. The Spirit, the Holy Spirit which has just descended upon him like a dove, blessing him and anointing him, this very Spirit of God immediately drives him out into the wilderness. And he is in the wilderness for 40 days, where he is with the wild beasts and tempted by Satan. This, just as much as the moment when the heavens break open with the Spirit and the voice booms from heaven, is what it means to be baptized into the church, to be

one with Christ, to be a disciple. I want you all to know that the Holy Spirit is the most amazing gift imaginable, and it will without a doubt drive you into the wilderness.

In our first scripture reading this morning, the prophet Isaiah says that God's spirit has sends him to bring good news to the poor, to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim release to the captives, and liberation to prisoners; to comfort all who mourn, rebuild ancient ruins, restore deserted places, and renew ruined cities. The spirit sends you to ruins and deserted places, and it gives you the strength and power to build a more just and loving world. The spirit sends you out amongst people in need: the sick and brokenhearted, prisoners and captives. The Spirit calls you to shine a light in dark places, to mend broken hearts, to bring hope to the hopeless, healing to the wounded, justice to the oppressed, peace to the afflicted, compassion and love to the outcast. The Spirit drives you to places you otherwise would not want to go. This is what sets you apart from those who live carelessly, aimlessly, and selfishly. You will not be afraid to go to the wilderness because God is always with you.

Our second scripture reading was written by the Apostle Paul while he was sitting in a jail cell. This is another wilderness into which the Spirit will drive you. Never forget that Jesus's message got him crucified, executed. To follow Christ is to walk a dangerous path. What a radical idea, to love not just those who love you, but to love your enemies as well. All people. Everyone. Everyone. You will encounter hatred, violence, bigotry, and injustice. These are like the wild beasts with Jesus in the wilderness and God calls us to meet these beasts with humility, gentleness, patience, and love. This is how God changes the world. Not by meeting hate with hate, but by transforming it with love. Carry God's love with you always, let it overflow from your heart, and fill this world with that Spirit of love.

Freddy, Charlotte, Brooke, and Katie, I'm almost done, so if you've drifted off, now is the time to pay attention. This is the last time you'll be forced to listen to me, but please listen. I promise you in the name of all that is Holy, this is the truth.

You are the light of the world. You are the children of God, the one who created all things, the source of all light and love and life. You are filled with the Holy Spirit. You must know this. You must feel this. You must never forget this. And, most of all, you must accept this.

Close your eyes, everybody. Take a deep breath and feel the Spirit of God come alive within you. Know this, feel this, and accept this: you are the light of the world. You are the child of God. You are filled with the Holy Spirit that loves you and guides you and strengthens you, and also drives you out into the wilderness. Open your eyes.

By affirming your baptisms today, you are accepting the gift of God's grace, which is like an ever-present spring of hope and peace in times of need. Yes, it is wonderful, and it is comforting, but it is not comfortable. It's not all warm and happy and fuzzy and snuggly. The Spirit of God is not a night light, a binky, or a security blanket. It's like a fire, or the wind, or rushing waters. It gives light and warmth, power and life, but it cannot be tamed or controlled. You do not get to decide when or where the Spirit will move you. In your lives, it will call you, uniquely, specifically you, with all of your gifts and talents and strengths, it will call you to places where you are needed, but where you may not necessarily want to go. This is the call of discipleship. To forget about what might be easy or comfortable, and drop your fishing nets, like Jesus's first disciples, and accept the movement of the Holy Spirit and fulfill the plans that God has for you. Don't fear the wilderness, the unknown. Accept the gift of the Spirit, have no fear, and go wherever the wind blows you. Amen.